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## MUSICAL WORKS' REPEATABILITY, AUDIBILITY AND VARIABILITY: A DISPOSITIONAL ACCOUNT

### ABSTRACT

This paper is devoted to face recent views in the ontology of music that reject that musical works are repeatable in musical performances. It will be observed that musical works' repeatability implies that they are audible and variable in their performances. To this extent, the aim here is to show that repeatability, audibility and variability are ontologically substantive features of musical works' nature. The thesis that will be defended is that repeatability, audibility and variability are dispositional non-aesthetic properties of musical works. The plausibility of the dispositional account of musical works' repeatability, audibility and variability will lead us to the conclusion that they are ontologically substantive features of musical works' nature, and consequently, any suitable explanation of the ontology of musical works must not ignore them.

### KEYWORDS

ontology of music, musical works, musical performances, repeatability, audibility, variability, dispositions, musical medium, common ground, contextualism.

### Introduction

Musical works are said to be repeatable to the extent that they can multiply occur through musical performances in different places either simultaneously or across time (cf. Goodman 1968; Wollheim 1980; Wolterstorff 1980; Levinson 1980; Kivy 1983; Rohrbaugh 2003; Dodd 2007). Beethoven's *5th Symphony* was premiered in Vienna in 1808, and it was performed again by the New York Philharmonic in 2015. By means of these performances, this work is taken to occur in Vienna and New York at different times. These performances are not copies but occurrences of Beethoven's *5th Symphony* in which we can hear, encounter, experience and appreciate the very same thing composed by Beethoven in 1808. Accordingly, musical works' repeatability implies their audibility. Musical works are said to be audible insofar they can be heard through their performances. It is assumed that we can hear a musical work by means of hearing a properly formed performance of it, either in an analogical or in a derivative sense (cf. Dodd 2007: 11; Wolterstorff 1980: 40; Davies 2009). In addition, musical works' repeatability implies their variability. A musical work is said to be variable to the extent that its 'multiple instances can differ from one another in artistically relevant respects' (Davies 2012: 643). Since musical performances are sound-sequence events, and events are bound to a specific space-time location, a work's performances are always different. Even in the

extreme case that two performances of a work were sonically indistinguishable, they would be different for the mere fact that they were produced at different places and times. Therefore, assuming that musical works are repeatable commits us to assume that they are audible and variable.

Despite the general agreement about the repeatable character of works of music, some sceptical views about it have recently arisen. Lydia Goehr (2007) and Alessandro Bertinetto (2016) have questioned the repeatable character of works of music, arguing that it is a belief that has emerged from a socio-historical conception about music, rather than a fact concerning musical works' ontological nature. These authors argue that musical works' repeatability is a belief suggested by an aesthetic ideal (the *Werktreue*) of a particular historical period (the classic-romantic period). According to the *Werktreue*, what makes a performance valuable is its fidelity in reproducing the work's score performed. The *Werktreue* claims that the valuable relation between a work and its properly formed performances is a relation of correspondence or matching: the performance must match the features of the work's score. This aesthetic value has suggested, according to these authors, the belief that musical works are repeatable. However, Bertinetto argues, this is an aesthetic ideal historically located in the classic-romantic period that does not apply beyond that era. In turn, Christopher Bartel (2017) has argued, on the basis of an experiment, that the intuition that musical works are repeatable is not as broadly shared in our musical practices as philosophers have usually taken it to be. Accordingly, ontologists have overestimated the relevance of such intuition in proposing their accounts for musical works' nature. Meanwhile, Allan Hazlett (2012) has offered an argument showing that the intuition that musical works are repeatable is inconsistent with the intuition that musical works are modally flexible entities –i.e. that they could have been different in other possible worlds. He takes the latter to be a strong intuition that ought to be preserved at the sacrifice of the intuition that musical works are repeatable.

The aim of this paper is to explore the plausibility of a factual account of musical works' repeatability, audibility and variability. The goal is to find an ontologically substantive account of the repeatable, audible and variable character of musical works that may face those accounts that aim to dismiss the relevance of these features concerning musical works' nature. The thesis that will be defended here is that repeatability, audibility and variability are dispositional non-aesthetic properties of musical works. This factual character of musical works' repeatability, audibility and variability will suggest that they are features that must not be superficially ignored by an adequate view of musical works' ontological nature. For this purpose, this paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, Jerrold Levinson's taxonomy of musical works non-aesthetic properties will be introduced. In the second section, it will be shown that musical works' repeatability does not satisfy the conditions to fall under any of the three kinds of non-aesthetic properties identified by Levinson. It will be argued that this situation does not imply that our claims about musical works' repeatability are not ontologically substantive. To this extent, it will be provided a dispositional account of repeatability that regards it as a dispositional non-aesthetic property of musical works. The third and fourth sections will follow the same strategy concerning audibility and variability, respectively, showing that they are dispositional non-aesthetic properties of

musical works. The conclusion that will be achieved is that repeatability, audibility and variability are ontologically substantive features of musical works' nature that must be accounted by an appropriate view of the ontology of musical works.

## 1. The Non-Aesthetic Properties of Musical Works

The features that can be ascribed to a musical work from a non-aesthetic point of view are of a wide diversity. For instance, Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* is said to be polyphonic, tonal, orchestral, symphonic, original, composed by Beethoven, influencer, in C minor, 1554 measures length, etc. There are two traits that, according to Frank Sibley, distinguish aesthetic from non-aesthetic attributions. The former but not the latter involve the exercise of taste and are non-condition governed (cf. Sibley 1959; Matravers 1996). Accordingly, there can be sufficient conditions for a non-aesthetic attribution to a musical work, regardless our aesthetic sensibility or taste. In this way, it is generally accepted that non-aesthetic uses of predicates are descriptive. When we apply a predicate in a non-aesthetic use to a musical work, we are typically describing the work's possession of a property independently of our affective responses to it. This view can be associated, on the ontological level, to a kind of realism (cf. Budd 2007: 336). It is reasonable to think that Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* is for orchestra, independently of our affective responses when we experience those works. A lover of Gregorian chant and a fanatic of Bach's fugues for four voices are able to recognize in the same way that Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* is for orchestra. When we judge that Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* is for orchestra we are describing a feature that the work possesses whether or not we feel pleasure or emotion in hearing it. This sort of realism *prima facie* fits Sibley's distinction between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic attributions. According to Sibley, 'it would be ridiculous to suggest that aesthetic sensitivity was required to see or notice or otherwise perceive that something is, say, large, circular, green, slow, or monosyllabic' (Sibley 1965: 135). Accordingly, realism and the descriptive character of our talk about non-aesthetic properties of musical works will be assumed in this paper. For this reason, I will speak indifferently about non-aesthetic predicates or properties.

An attempt to classify the heterogeneity of non-aesthetic properties of musical works –and of artworks in general– has been offered by Levinson. Levinson has identified three different kinds of non-aesthetic properties: structural, substructural and relational (Levinson 2011: 135). Structural properties are perceivable intrinsic features of musical works. Examples of them are *being polyphonic, monodic, contrapuntal, polyrhythmical, orchestral, atonal, tonal, high-pitched or low-pitched*. All these properties can be identified by hearing a properly formed performance of a work. In audition, we get all we need to judge that *De Angelis* Gregorian Mass is monodic, given that it is constituted only by the voice of the melody, that Mozart's *Horn Concerto K495* is polyphonic, since its texture is generally an accompanied melody, and that Bach's fugues are contrapuntal, for simultaneously different melodic lines with their own personality can be perceived. A trained listener is able to distinguish in a mere audition that Mozart's symphonies are tonal while Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* is atonal. Therefore, structural properties are perceivable manifest non-aesthetic properties of a musical work.

Substructural properties are defined as physical features of a work that cannot be discerned in direct perception of a work's performances (Levinson 2011: 135). *Having 600 bars of 4/4, having exactly 2556 crochets and being in E flat major* are examples of substructural properties of musical works. It is impossible to determine in audition the exact number of crochets of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. The difference between *having exactly 2556 crochets* and *having exactly 2557 crochets* cannot be discerned by hearing a performance of it. We need to resort to the work's score and counting one by one the crochets of the piece. Or, alternatively, in audition, we would need the additional non-perceptual information of the equivalence of one crochet in real time. A similar thing happens with the property of *having 600 bars of 4/4*. In a direct perception, the difference between *having 600 bars of 4/4*, *having 601 bars of 4/4* and *having 600 bars of 4/4 and one silent bar of 2/4* cannot be discerned. Moreover, there is a sense in which typical structural properties, as *being in E flat major*, can be taken to be substructural ones, even for those listeners having perfect pitch. In audition, a perfect-pitch listener is only justified to say that the work is in a major tonality whose fundamental pitch corresponds to a frequency around 311 Hz. However, there are two major tonalities compatible with this frequency as fundamental sound: E flat major and D sharp major. Deciding in which of these tonalities the piece is placed requires additional non-perceptual information to be obtained from an analysis of the work's score.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, substructural properties are non-straightforwardly perceivable non-aesthetic properties of a work.

Finally, contextual properties are relations of the work to elements of its context of composition. Examples of contextual properties are *being original*, *being composed by*, *being influenced by* or *being in a certain genre*. By contrast with structural and substructural properties, contextual properties are not monadic, but at least dyadic ones, i.e. they have at least two argument places. One of the places is always filled by the musical work, and the other(s) is saturated by an element of the context of composition. This is easy to see in predicates as '*x* being composed by *y*': the *x* place is filled by a work (ex. The *Fifth Symphony*) and the *y* place by a composer (ex. Beethoven). However, this is not so obvious in cases like 'being original'. This predicate seems to have only one argument place ('*x* is original') to be filled by the musical work at stake. Nevertheless, when we say that the *Fifth Symphony* is original, we do not mean that this piece is original *simpliciter*, but relatively to the set of musical works composed until that moment, or to other set of pieces relevant in the conversational context. Accordingly, predicates as 'being original' have a hidden argument place to be filled by the relevant set of works in the conversational context. A musical work is said to be original only in relation to other pieces. Therefore, contextual properties are relational non-aesthetic properties of a work.

1 For an interesting discussion regarding this topic, see Davies 2001: 48–54. According to Davies 2001: 51, and concerning tonal music, 'pitches are named, *indirectly* or directly, with regard to their scalar position' (My emphasis). His point is that, firstly, the identity of pitched tones depends on their place within sequences of intervals but not on their frequencies, due to the variability of the relation between them; and secondly, the identity of intervals depends on their place in tonally structured sequences (Davies 2001: 53). Additionally, I claim that the identity of tonality depends on its place in the general structure of the piece and on its relation to the other tonalities, if any, involved in the piece.

According to Levinson, structural, substructural and contextual attributes exhaust the sort of non-aesthetic properties of an artwork upon which its aesthetic properties depend (Levinson 2011: 136).<sup>2</sup> However, Levinson's taxonomy does not exhaust the kinds of non-aesthetic properties that musical works have. Levinson is interested only in those non-aesthetic properties that stand in a relation of dependence with the aesthetic ones. To complete the analysis of the non-aesthetic properties of musical works, an additional kind of non-aesthetic properties has to be considered. This kind of properties is different in nature from the three sorts considered by Levinson, and it is the one to which musical works' repeatability, audibility and variability belong. None of these features can be classified into the three groups of non-aesthetic features identified by Levinson. However, as we shall see, there are good reasons to take them to be factual, and hence, substantive features of musical works. In what follows, I will address each one of these features trying to show the plausibility to take their nature as that of dispositional properties.

## 2. Repeatability as a Disposition

As introduced previously, musical works are said to be repeatable in the sense that they *can* occur through their performances in different places and times (cf. Dodd 2007: 9 and ff.; Rohrbaugh 2003; Howell 2002). The repeatable character of musical works consists in a one-to-many relation: we hear, encounter, experience and have access to a same musical work in its different properly formed performances. There is something in common to these performances, namely, the musical work they perform. If repeatability is a property of musical works, then it is a non-aesthetic one, in the sense pointed in the introduction of this paper. Attributions of repeatability to musical works satisfy none of the two conditions set by Sibley for aesthetic attributions. Firstly, repeatability is a feature that we attribute to musical works regardless our reactions and attitudes towards them. I say that Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* is repeatable just by noticing that there is something in common between some musical performances, something that does not require any emotional response relative to my aesthetic taste. Secondly, there are sufficient conditions to say that Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* is repeatable: the existence of musical performances that fully satisfy the score's prescriptions. Therefore, if repeatability is a musical works' property, it is a non-aesthetic property. The goal of this section is to explore whether the general claim that musical works are repeatable, or particular claims such as 'The *Fifth Symphony* is repeatable', are substantive from an ontological point of view, i.e. if they describe musical works as possessing repeatability as a real property.

The first task is to explore whether musical works' repeatability satisfies the conditions to fall under any of the different sorts of non-aesthetic properties distinguished by Levinson. The first thing to note is that 'being repeatable' is a monadic predicate. When I say that the *Fifth Symphony* is repeatable, my claim is that the *Fifth Symphony* is repeatable *simpliciter*, not relatively to any other parameter. Consequently, since contextual properties are not monadic but relational

2 Levinson only assumes this exhaustivity, while recognizing that it is not proved.

ones, musical works' repeatability does not satisfy the conditions to be a contextual non-aesthetic property of musical works. It does not satisfy the condition to fall under this sort of levinsonian non-aesthetic properties.

Musical works' repeatability also fails to be a substructural non-aesthetic property of musical works. The examples given by Levinson of substructural properties are the following: *having a straight line 5.005 centimetres long, exemplifying the ratio 999/2000, containing an angle of 60° 30', being scored for exactly 105 violins in unison, and containing 12,345 h's* (Levinson 2011: 114–116). All these properties have in common that they specify measurable features of artworks. However, repeatability is not a property that specifies the measure of any feature of musical works. Moreover, one of the reasons adduced by Levinson for taking *being scored for exactly 105 violins in unison* to be a substructural property is that one will not detect in a work's performance audition a change from 105 to 104 violins. In the same way, *having a straight line 5.005 centimetres long* is a substructural property because one is not able to detect in seeing a painting the change from 5.005 to 5.006 centimetres. However, this phenomenon does not happen concerning musical works' repeatability. There is no alternative feature from which repeatability cannot be discerned in the audition of a work's performances. The only alternative is non-repeatability, i.e. the negation of repeatability, but this is not the point of Levinson's reasoning. Consequently, musical works' repeatability does not fit these two characteristics of substructural properties' nature. Therefore, it cannot be classified as a substructural non-aesthetic property.

Nonetheless, it might be argued that repeatability is a structural property of musical works. It might be claimed that I know that a musical work is repeatable in listening to, at least, two performances of it. If these performances accomplish the work's score, we perceive in hearing them that the work has been performed more than once. Accordingly, repeatability would be a perceivable feature of musical works and, consequently, it would fall under the class of structural non-aesthetic properties. As Levinson notes, 'an attribute is perceivable in a work if the work can be determined to have the attribute through appropriate experience of the work' (Levinson 2011: 113).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it seems that, knowing what 'repeatability' means, I could determine by perception alone that a musical work is repeatable in the same way as, knowing what 'monodic' means, I can determine by perception alone that a work is monodic. If this view were right, I would be able to know non-inferentially that a work is repeatable only by what I perceive in an audition of it, and hence repeatability would be a structural non-aesthetic property of musical works.

However, this view is not right. I need additional information to the one provided by perception alone to determine if a work is repeatable. There is a notable difference between repeatability and structural features as monodic, contrapuntal or atonal: while the latter can be noticed in a single audition of a piece, I need, by definition, to listen to a work at least twice in order to ascribe the property of repeatability to it. But even disregarding this difference, I need additional information

3 Levinson himself acknowledges that the term 'appropriate' is vague and that 'what counts as *appropriate perception* for one work of art is very different from what counts as such for another' (My emphasis).



not given in aural perception to determine if a piece of music is repeatable. I need to know the relation holding between the two performances that I have attended. To grasp it, I need to know, among other things, that these two performances are both properly formed performances of the work and that between them holds an enough degree of similarity. This is a kind of information that is not given in direct perception, involving elements of the context of composition and reception of the piece that require inferences to be obtained. By contrast, additional information to perception is not needed in the case of 'monodic' because, if I know what 'monodic' means, I obtain through my ears all what I need to discern if a piece is monodic. That is, in aurally registering just a single melodic line with no musical accompaniment, I need nothing else to describe the piece as monodic.

Therefore, it seems that musical works' repeatability does not satisfy the conditions to fall under any of the three kinds of non-aesthetic properties identified by Levinson. Repeatability is neither a structural nor a sub-structural nor a contextual non-aesthetic property of musical works. Accordingly, we might plausibly conclude that our claims about musical works' repeatability are not ontologically substantive. By means of these claims, we would not be ascribing any real non-aesthetic property to musical works. We would not be describing anything about musical works' ontological nature. However, that would be a too fast conclusion if we attend more closely to the reasons adduced in the previous paragraph for rejecting that repeatability is a structural a non-aesthetic property of musical works.

The epistemic differences involved in the adscription of the predicates 'monodic' and 'being repeatable' to musical works do not necessarily lead us to consider that the former but not the latter is a real non-aesthetic property of musical works. The epistemic difference in the adscription of such predicates might be regarded as a consequence of the different nature of the properties referred by means of those predicates. While former is a manifest property of musical works, the latter is a power that musical works have. This different nature explains the differences in the epistemic access we have to them. According to Hume, we cannot infer from direct perception the powers a thing has:<sup>4</sup>

It must certainly be allowed that nature has kept us at a great distance from all her secrets, and has afforded us only the knowledge of a few superficial qualities of objects; while she conceals from us those powers and principles, on which the influence of these objects entirely depends. Our senses inform us of the colour, weight, and consistence of bread; but neither sense nor reason can ever inform us of those qualities, which fit it for the nourishment and support of a human body (Hume 1748: E 32–33).

In the same way as Adam, at the very first and with his cognitive skills in perfect working, cannot infer from the fluidity and transparency of water that it can suffocate him (Hume 1748: E 27), we cannot infer the repeatability of a work in merely hearing two performances of it. Audition alone does not suffice to ascribe to a work the property of being repeatable. Following Hume's view, what we obtain in

4 This does not imply that Hume's view is that no concept of power can be applied. It would be needed an additional assumption, the *Thesis of Deductivism*, according to which 'any judgement is rationally supported only by that which entails the truth of the judgement' (Molnar 2003: 119). However, the assumption of this principle would lead us to many counterintuitive ontological consequences (cf. Molnar 2003: 121–4).

perception is not the work being repeated in two performances, but only two performances presenting similar set of manifest properties –as the structural properties of *being polyphonic, monodic, contrapuntal, polyrhythmical, orchestral, atonal, tonal, high-pitched* or *low-pitched*. Therefore, the analysis above suggests that, although repeatability does not fall under any of the sorts of non-aesthetic properties distinguished by Levinson, it may be regarded as a dispositional property of musical works.

Dispositions are properties directed to certain manifestations, individuated by their directedness to such manifestations, but not ontologically dependent on their manifestations. Typical examples of dispositions are fragility, solubility or elasticity (cf. Armstrong 2010; Mellor 2012; Mumford 2009). A glass is said to be fragile. This property is directed to its manifestation, namely, the glass shattered. However, the glass possessing the property of being fragile does not ontologically depend on its actual ravage or in having been shattered in a previous time. The glass possesses the property of being fragile even if its manifestation never arises. As Armstrong acknowledges, it is not unusual particulars having dispositions that never manifest during their history (Armstrong 2010: 49). Moreover, according to Molnar (2003: 58), dispositions are intrinsic to their bearers, in the sense that the bearer's having the disposition is ontologically independent of any other thing wholly distinct from the bearer (cf. Molnar 2003: 39, 40). Due to the force of gravity on Earth, a glass tends to break when dropped off. Alternatively, the force of gravity on the Moon is significantly lower, so that the same glass does not have the tendency to break when dropped off there. However, the glass still has the disposition of being fragile even in the lunar ecosystem. It is generally assumed that the ascription of dispositions is closely linked to counterfactual conditionals (cf. Choi & Fara 2016). These counterfactual conditionals determine the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the property. For instance, sugar is said to have the disposition of being soluble. The solubility of the sugar is closely linked to the counterfactual conditional 'x quantity of sugar would dissolve if put into y quantity of water'. Dissolution is not the normal state of sugar, but a state that sugar will adopt if certain conditions hold. Similarly happens with the glass. Shattering is not the normal state of the glass, but one that the glass will adopt if certain conditions hold, ones that do not actually hold in the moon.

If repeatability is a dispositional property of musical works, it must satisfy the definitory features of dispositions introduced in the last paragraph. First of all, musical works' repeatability is directed to an occurrence of the work, or more precisely, to the work occur again by means of a musical performance or a reproduction of a recording of it. Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* occurring again by means of a musical performance is a manifestation of its repeatability as a dispositional property. New York Philharmonic's performance of the *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* on 31<sup>st</sup> October of 2015 was a manifestation of the repeatability of this work. In this performance, the audience of the concert encountered the very work composed by Beethoven and had access to it. The *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony*'s repeatability is individuated by this kind of manifestation. This is what distinguishes it from other dispositions, as solubility. Both solubility and repeatability can be powers an object has. However, while solubility is directed to that the object be dissolved, repeatability is directed to a new occurrence of an object.



In addition, a work's repeatability is not dependent on its manifestation. A work that has never been performed, or that has been performed only once, is not precluded of being repeatable. For instance, Antonio Florian's *Por Tripicado*, a minimalist piece for brass quintet, was premiered by the Proemium Metals on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015. This piece has not been performed again, but if suitable conditions hold – as the Proemium Metals programing the piece for a concert and performing accurately its sound structure to an appropriate audience – the work will take place again by means of a properly performance of it. Derek Bourgeois' *Brass Quintet No. 2* was composed in 1972 for the Philip Jones Ensemble. However, the British group declared the piece impossible to play due to its very high technical difficulty, and it remained unperformed until April 2014, when it was premiered by the Proemium Metals. Since the composer declared the piece finished in 1972 and he delivered the work in an institutional act to the group that commissioned it, it would be mistaken to claim that the work does not exist prior to April 2014. Moreover, it would be mistaken to take the Philip Jones Ensemble's declaration that the piece was impossible to play as entailing that the work was not repeatable at that time. Instead, the piece was repeatable, at least, since the composer finished and deliver it in 1972, but the suitable conditions for the manifestation of its repeatability did not hold until April 2014. These two real examples of our musical practices illustrate that a work's repeatability is not ontologically dependent on the manifestation of such property.

As other dispositions, musical works' repeatability is associated to a counterfactual that specifies the suitable conditions for its manifestation. The canonical analysis of dispositions in counterfactual terms adopts the following form: an object is disposed to M when C iff it would M if it were the case that C (cf. Choi & Fara 2016). For instance, sugar is disposed to dissolve when put into water – i.e. sugar is soluble – iff it would dissolve if it were put into water. The corresponding counterfactual for musical works' repeatability can be formulated as follows:

A work W is repeatable in a musical medium M iff W would occur if it were the case that W's sound structure is performed or reproduced in M.

The counterfactual determines as suitable conditions for the manifestation of a work's repeatability a performance or reproduction of the work's sound structure in a specific musical medium. For instance, if the sound structure of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* were performed by The Hallé Orchestra at the Bridgewater Hall Manchester to an audience compounded by the subscribers to the orchestra's 2017/18 season, *Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* would occur again. The musical medium consists of the place in which the reproduction of the sound structure is made, a time, the professional musicians of the orchestra and a qualified audience. The notion of artistic medium has been characterised as the 'shared understandings upon which the artist draws as to the specific implications of particular manipulations of the vehicular medium for a work's artistic content' (Davies 2011: 49). The people gathered in the Bridgewater Hall – musicians and audience – shares certain understandings about music. This set of shared understandings can be regarded as a *common ground*, what for Stalnaker is a context, who defines it as a 'a body of information that is presumed to be shared by the parties to a discourse' (Stalnaker 2014: 2). In this case, the body of information is compounded by musical theories

and knowledge regarding the practices of classical music Western tradition. The performers presuppose this body of information in a pragmatic sense when they are reproducing the sound structure of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony*. They take for granted the truth of this body of information and assume that the others involved in the context – other artists, critics, and listeners – do the same, analogously to what happens in ordinary conversational contexts (cf. Stalnaker 2014: 3–4). When the sound structure of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* is performed in a musical medium like this, the work's disposition to occur again is manifested.

Of course, a radically different cultural community from the one described above – one whose members lack the concepts of musical work, composition, authorship, score and authenticity – is conceivable. The musical medium of this different culture is one in which there are only performances: people play and hear music regardless anything else beyond the actual sounds being produced at the moment of that performance. In this community, a reproduction of the sound structure of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* would not count as an occurrence of this work. However, this fact does not entail that Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* is a fiction and that musical works are not repeatable. Instead, the point is that the repeatability of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* never manifests in this community. The work possesses the disposition of being repeatable, but it remains unmanifested in this culture because this culture does not provide the suitable conditions for the manifestation of musical works' repeatability. However, even in this medium, the work possesses the disposition of being repeatable, although unmanifested.

An analogy between repeatability and fragility may illustrate the point introduced in the previous paragraph. Fragility is defined as 'a disposition to break when easily dropped' (Mumford 2009: 476). Glasses are typically said to be fragile. For instance, if a glass were dropped on Earth, it would break. Earth's gravity satisfies the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the glass' fragility. However, if the very same glass were dropped on the Moon, it would not break because Moon's gravity does not satisfy the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the glass' fragility. Although the glass' fragility remains unmanifested in the Moon, the glass possesses this disposition even there. If, suddenly, Moon's mass increases 81 times, the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the glass' fragility would hold and, if it were dropped, it would break. Analogously, if some of the shared understandings in the abovementioned musical medium were removed to accommodate the concepts of musical work, composition, authorship, score and authenticity, the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the repeatability of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* would hold. The case of the glass shows the intrinsic character of dispositions: the possession of the disposition by the glass is ontologically independent of any other thing wholly distinct from that glass. Its possession is not ontologically dependent on the medium in which the glass is. The glass is fragile in both media, Earth and Moon. By contrast, the manifestation of its disposition is ontologically dependent on the medium – indeed, it is an unmanifested disposition on the Moon. Analogously, the possession of repeatability by Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* is ontologically independent of the medium in which its sound structure is performed. The work is repeatable in both media, the Western musical tradition and this alternative culture. Only the manifestation of the disposition is ontologically dependent

on the medium – repeatability is an unmanifested disposition of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* in the alternative culture.

Therefore, the manifestation of musical works' repeatability is a fact of the medium of Western musical tradition. This fact is explained in dispositional terms: repeatability is a dispositional property of musical works whose manifestation arises when suitable conditions hold. Accordingly, repeatability is neither a false aesthetic ideal (Bertinetto 2016), nor an intuition to arbitrate between musical practices (Bartel 2017), nor a theoretical feature that we ascribe to musical works from assigning to them the ontological category of abstract objects (Hazlett 2012). It is not an ideological feature. Repeatability is a substantive feature of musical works' ontological nature. It is a dispositional property of them. The phenomenon that musical works bear the dispositional property of repeatability is a fact of our musical practices that must not be ignored by an appropriate explanation of musical works' ontological nature.

### 3. Audibility as a Disposition

As noted in the introduction, musical works' repeatability implies their audibility. Given the factual character of repeatability as a dispositional property of musical works, it seems plausible that a similar phenomenon arises for their audibility. This is the item to be explored in this section. Let us recall that musical works are said to be audible to the extent that, through their performances, we can hear them. As happens with repeatability, if audibility is a property of musical works, it is a non-aesthetic one. The attribution of audibility to musical works does not satisfy, at least, one of Sibley's conditions for aesthetic attributions. Audibility is a feature that we attribute to musical works regardless our emotional reactions in an audition of them. I attribute audibility to Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* independently of my affective reactions when hearing a properly formed performance of that symphony. Therefore, if audibility is a musical works' property, it is of a non-aesthetic kind. The relevant question is, again, to determine whether musical works' audibility is substantive from an ontological point of view. To this extent, the task is to ascertain whether the property of being audible falls under any of the sorts of non-aesthetic properties pointed by Levinson, or it is of a dispositional nature, as musical works' repeatability. Accommodating musical works' audibility in one of these two cases would provide us with a factual and ontologically substantive account of it. If so, there would be good reasons to regard audibility as a feature of musical works' nature.

In the first place, it might seem that I can determine that a musical work is audible in an aural perception of it. If I go to a concert and hear a performance of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*, I am justified to attribute to this piece the property of being audible. It might be thought thus that audibility is a structural non-aesthetic property of musical works. However, there is a notable difference between audibility and structural properties such as monodic, contrapuntal or atonal. What I detect non-inferentially in an audition of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* is that it is polyphonic and for orchestra, that its first movement has a music cell that repeats all time, or that it starts in a minor tonality. However, as in the case of repeatability, I do not

detect non-inferentially, i.e. in direct perception, that Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* is audible. At least, I have to make the very simple inference that Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* is audible since I hear it by hearing a performance of it. In a broader sense of perception, we can rightly think that the involvement of such inference is not enough to deny the perceptual character of audibility. However, Levinson's characterization of structural properties seems to be extreme, in the sense that he claims that a structural feature is 'anything composing the object on a fundamental level of observation' (Levinson 2011: 135). It is doubtful that we can accommodate such inferences at the *fundamental level of observation*. But even if we do so, audibility is not something *composing* Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* as pitches, tonalities or timbres do. According to the definition of composition,  $x_p, \dots, x_n$  compose  $y$  if and only if  $x_p, \dots, x_n$  are parts of  $y$ , and for every  $z$ , such that  $z$  is a part of  $y$ , there is some  $x_i$  (where  $1 \leq i \leq n$ ) such that  $z$  overlaps  $x_i$  (Caplan & Bright 2005: 62). It seems that some pitches, tonalities and timbres are parts of the *Fifth Symphony*, and that for every other thing being a part of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*, it overlaps some of these pitches, tonalities and timbres. However, audibility is not, in any sense, a part of the *Fifth Symphony* and then, no relation of overlapping holds between audibility and any other part of the symphony. Therefore, the nature of audibility seems to be different from the nature of structural properties.

In the second place, it might be argued that there are grounds to consider audibility as a contextual feature, taking it to be a relational property. Following this view, when I say that Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* is audible, my claim is not that it is audible *simpliciter*, but relatively to beings equipped by an appropriate perceptual mechanism. Nevertheless, this relativity of audibility does not make it a contextual property in the levinsonian way, since the domain of the relata is not restricted to the context of composition of the work to which this property is ascribed. When I say that the *Fifth Symphony* is audible, I do not mean that it is audible *only* for Beethoven's contemporaries, but for all beings from any time equipped by the appropriate perceptual apparatus. In addition, and more relevant, although the description of a property might involve the reference to other things – in the case of audibility, the reference to beings equipped by an appropriate perceptual mechanism –, the property itself does not need to be relational.<sup>5</sup> The other elements alluded in the description of the property are, rather, the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the property. As in the case of repeatability, audibility can be regarded as a dispositional property associated to a counterfactual specifying the suitable conditions for its manifestation. This counterfactual can be specified as follows:

A work W is audible in a musical medium M iff W would be heard if it were the case that W's sound structure is performed or reproduced in M.

The musical medium in which musical works are typically performed is compound by human beings having a perceptual apparatus that allows musical works to be heard by an audience. The perceptual apparatus of the human beings involved in the musical medium of Western musical tradition satisfies the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the audibility of musical works. By contrast, if Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* were performed in a community of deaf people, it would

5 I am very grateful to Derek Matravers on this point.

not be heard. The audibility of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* remains unmanifested in this community because it is a musical medium that does not satisfy the suitable conditions for its manifestation. Nonetheless, the suitable conditions that a musical medium provides for audibility are not only constrained to the selection of an audience having an appropriate perceptual apparatus. The shared understandings of the musical medium allow a performance of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* sound structure to be perceived *as* a performance in which the work itself can be heard by the audience. In the same way as the shared understandings of an artistic medium allows a brushstroke in a canvas to be artistically meaningful (cf. Davies 2013: 225–227), the shared understandings of the musical medium of Western musical tradition allows a reproduction of the 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*'s sound structure not to be perceived as mere noise, but as a performance in which a musical work is heard. Therefore, rather than a contextual property, audibility is a disposition of musical works. As in the case of repeatability, the possession of this disposition intrinsic to musical works, but its manifestation is dependent on external factors satisfying certain conditions.

Against the dispositional view of musical works' audibility, it might be objected that it is a substructural non-aesthetic property. It might be assumed that the property of *being audible* can be reduced to the property of *being in the hearing range* or *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz*.<sup>6</sup> Since every audible thing is audible in virtue of *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz*, *being audible* seems to be grounded on the property of *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz*. Then, we might think that both properties are coextensional and equivalent, at least in our actual world. Following this line of reasoning, if *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz* is a substructural property of musical works, *being audible* would be also a substructural one, since it can be reduced to the former property.

However, this view does not support the idea that audibility is a substructural property for two reasons. Firstly, there is a sense in which being in the hearing range, or *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz*, is a perceptual property. One can perceptually detect a change from being between 20 Hz and 20 kHz and being between 20 Hz and 21 kHz. While in the first case all the pitches of the work can be heard, in the second case there are pitches of the piece that cannot, namely, those falling between 20 kHz and 21 kHz. This is a perceivable difference and, consequently, *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz* is a structural property in this sense. However, we have seen previously that audibility is not a structural, and hence, directly perceivable property of musical works.

Secondly, there is another sense in which *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz* is a non-perceptual property, motivating its accommodation as a sub-structural property. One cannot perceptually detect a change from *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz* and *having a frequency range between 21 Hz and 19'999 kHz*. However, from the fact that *being audible* and *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz* are coextensive, it does not follow that they are equivalent (cf. Cohen 2002). The former has causal powers that cannot

6 This view would be to hold a *categoricallist* about properties as Armstrong, according to which all true properties are non-dispositional (cf. Armstrong 1997: 80).

be reduced to the causal powers of the latter. By contrast with *not being audible*, *not having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz* does not entail *per se* that people will not enjoy of the sound of all melodies in the audition of a piece possessing that property, or that a performer will decide not to study some passages of the work because nobody will hear if he is playing them right, wrong, expressively or awfully, and so on. Conversely, people will enjoy of all the melodies, and the performer will decide to study the piece, because it *is audible*, not because it *has a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz*. The shared understandings of a musical medium, associated to the conditions for the manifestation of audibility as a disposition, confers causal powers to the property of being audible that are absent for the property of *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz*. These shared understandings explain the motivations for the audience's audition and for the performer's performance. The shared understandings are precisely what make a reproduction of a sound structure to be perceived as a performance in which a musical work is heard. They play a role in the manifestation of *being audible*, but they play no role in the manifestation of *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz*, granting a series of causal powers to the former that are absent for the latter. Therefore, being audible cannot be reduced to *having a frequency range between 20 Hz and 20 kHz*. Consequently, audibility is a musical works' non-aesthetic property whose nature is different from structural, substructural and contextual ones.

Therefore, as it happens with repeatability, we have good reasons to conclude that audibility is a dispositional property of musical works whose manifestation is a fact of the musical medium of Western musical tradition. We go to concerts in which the *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* is programmed, reproduce recordings of it and play its melodies because we want to hear this work. This fact is explained in dispositional terms: audibility is a dispositional property of musical works whose manifestation arises when suitable conditions hold. Accordingly, audibility is a substantive feature of musical works' ontological nature. The phenomenon of musical works being audible by means of its performances is a fact of our musical practices that the ontology of music must not ignore.

#### 4. Variability as a disposition

It has been noted at the beginning of this paper that musical works' repeatability does not only imply their audibility. It also implies their variability. A musical work is said to be variable, let me recall, to the extent that its 'multiple instances can differ from one another in artistically relevant respects' (Davies 2012: 643). It is broadly assumed that two performances can vary in tempo, dynamics, timbre, and balance, and however be legitimate occurrences of the same musical work (Dodd 2007: 2; Davies 2003: 33). In addition, it is also broadly accepted that a musical work can occur in performances having some wrong notes (cf. Davies 2003: 33). Performances having wrong notes are not perfectly formed performances of a work, but they can be regarded as occurrences of it. Therefore, when we say that the *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* is variable, we are saying that it multiply occurs in different manners. In the same way as repeatability and audibility, if variability is a property of musical works, it is a non-aesthetic one. Our attributions of variability to musical works



do not satisfy, at least, one of Sibley's conditions for aesthetic attributions. There are sufficient conditions to judge a musical work as variable. Given that the premiere of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* in 1808 and the performance of the New York Philharmonic are different in nuances, timbre and tempo, if they are regarded as properly formed performances of the *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony*, this is enough to say that the *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* is variable. Therefore, audibility cannot be considered as an aesthetic property of musical works. Accordingly, the point is to explore whether it can be accommodated within any of the three sorts of levinsonian non-aesthetic properties or within the dispositional account offered for repeatability and variability. If that were the case, there would be good reasons to consider variability as a factual feature of musical works' ontological nature.

Since variability attributes the possibility of differences between occurrences of a same musical work, the description of variability involves the reference to at least two occurrences of a work. Accordingly, variability might be characterised as a relational property, and the doors are open to classify it as a contextual non-aesthetic property of musical works. However, as in the case of audibility, this is not a plausible option because the domain of the relata is not restricted to the context of composition of the work. If variability were a relational property in the levinsonian sense, it would have as relata occurrences of the work and also some relevant features of the context of composition of the work. However, contexts of performance –and not the context of composition– are the contexts that determine the limits of the variability of musical works in performance. They determine the degree of similarity to be satisfied by the properly formed performances of a work by determining how a composer's instructions in a score are to be understood. Consequently, the scope of a musical work's variability can vary from context to context. For instance, in a festival of historical performances, a performance of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* on modern instruments would not be regarded as an occurrence of that piece. By contrast, it would be accepted as an occurrence in the context of the audience of the 2017/18 season of the Bridgewater Hall Manchester. Another case: let us consider a warming and brilliant performance of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* having a wrong note on the 1<sup>st</sup> movement horn solo –the horn soloist performed by mistake a C instead of a B flat as the first note of the solo. In the context of a concert hall, this performance will be regarded as an occurrence of the *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony*. Meanwhile, in the context of a recording studio, this performance will be rejected to be included in an album because it would not be regarded as an occurrence of it. Therefore, variability does not satisfy Levinson's characterisation of contextual non-aesthetic properties: it would be a triadic property and none of the relata has to do with the work's context of composition.

Accordingly, given the apparent relational character of variability and that it does not fall under the category of Levinson's contextual properties, let us explore the plausibility of a dispositional account for it. In this sense, some similarities between audibility and variability can be noted. As in the case of audibility, although the description of the property of being variable involves the reference to other things different from the property –for instance, the reference to at least two occurrences of the same work–, the property itself needs not to be relational. The possession of this property by a work is not ontologically dependent on the existence of at least two occurrences of it. The example of *Bourgeois' Brass Quintet*

*Nº2* illustrates how an unperformed piece has the power of being properly performed in different artistically relevant respects in the future. This phenomenon does not make variability to be a structural or a sub-structural non-aesthetic property. Rather, variability would be better characterised as a dispositional property of musical works, and the external issues involved in the description of the property are part of the suitable conditions for its manifestation. For instance, the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the variability attributed to Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* requires this piece to be repeatable in multiple performances. As in the case of repeatability and audibility, variability can be associated to a counterfactual specifying the suitable conditions for its manifestation in the following terms:

A work *W* is variable in a musical medium *M* at time  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  iff *W* would occur at  $t_1$  and at  $t_2$  if *W*'s sound structure were performed or reproduced in different artistically relevant respects in *M* at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  (being  $t_1 \leq t_2$ ).

The counterfactual determines as suitable conditions for the manifestation of a work's variability that the following facts arise: 1) at least two musical performances or reproductions, either temporally coincident or separated in time; 2) that these two performances or reproductions to be of the same sound structure; 3) an appropriate musical medium. The musical medium determines the scope of manifestation of a work's variability in an analogous way than the natural medium determines the scope of manifestation of the glass' fragility. Since Mars' mass is substantially lower than Earth's mass, the scope of situations in which a glass is broken on Mars is more reduced than on Earth. Analogously, since a festival of historical performances only admits as occurrences of a work those performances implemented on historical instruments, the scope of admissible differences between properly formed performances of a musical work is more reduced there than in an open-minded musical medium admitting any class of instruments for performance. But, even, there are contexts in which the scope of the manifestation of a work's variability reduces to an absolute minimum. The cultural community whose members lack the concepts of musical work, composition, authorship, score and authenticity would be one not satisfying the suitable conditions for the manifestation of variability, for it is a culture in which musical works are not taken to occur more than once. The 5<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* cannot be performed in different artistically relevant respects in that context of performance because the work does not occur more than once. Variability is an unmanifested disposition of musical works in that musical medium, as fragility is an unmanifested disposition of a glass on the Moon.

The dispositional account of variability, including the musical medium as part of the suitable conditions for the manifestation of the property, accommodates Davies' idea that 'the range of acceptable variations' of a work is 'constrained by the norms of the intended performing community' (Davies 2012: 652). In this sense, Davies claims that 'it is through the practices and norms of a performative and receptive community that the proper understanding of the composer's prescriptions is given' (Davies 2012: 653). However, the dispositional account of variability shows that the nature of musical works is not ontologically dependent on the shared understandings or the tacit conception of the musical medium. The existence of the work and its possession of the property of being variable do not depend on a particular set of beliefs shared by the members of a specific musical context. The

tacit conception of the musical medium plays an important role by providing the conditions for the manifestation of a work's variability. However, the role of such tacit conception does not consist in determining the nature of musical works. The dependence of the manifestation of musical works' variability on a musical medium does not make the nature of musical works to be determined by what we think about them in such medium. Consequently, the dispositional account of variability offers a characterization of our musical practices that acknowledges the relevance of the role played by the tacit conception while leaves open, at the same time, the possibility of metaontological realism for musical works.

Therefore, as it happens with repeatability and audibility, the variability of musical works is a fact of the musical medium of Western musical tradition. This fact is explained in dispositional terms: variability is a dispositional property of musical works whose manifestation arises when suitable conditions hold. Therefore, the phenomenon of musical works being variable is a fact of our musical practices to be accommodated by any account aiming to explain the ontological nature of musical works.

## 5. Conclusions

In recent debate, some views that deny that musical works are repeatable – and derivatively that they are variable and audible – have emerged. The aim of this paper was to respond to these views by showing that repeatability, audibility and variability are ontologically substantive features of musical works to be explained by the ontology of music. Firstly, Levinson's taxonomy of the non-aesthetic properties of musical works has been introduced. It has been noted that this taxonomy is not exhaustive of all sorts of non-aesthetic properties of musical works. It is just exhaustive of those non-aesthetic properties upon which aesthetic properties depend. For this reason, it was not problematic that musical works' repeatability, audibility and variability do not satisfy the conditions to fall within any of the three sorts of non-aesthetic properties identified by Levinson. It does not imply that they are not real properties of musical works. To this extent, it has been shown that the nature of musical works' repeatability, audibility and variability can be satisfactorily explained by means of a dispositional account of properties. In addition, since repeatability implies audibility and variability, the fact that these two latter features can be explained by a dispositional account theoretically reinforces the idea that musical works' repeatability is a dispositional property. The dispositional account offers thus a homogeneous account of the nature of repeatability and its implications. Accordingly, it has been concluded that repeatability, audibility and variability are dispositional non-aesthetic properties of musical works, and hence, ontologically substantive features of musical works' nature that must not be ignored but explained by any appropriate ontological account of works of music.

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## Ponovljivost, audibilnost i varijabilnost muzičkih dela: dispozicionalni pristup

### Apstrakt

Ovaj rad bavi se recentnim stanovištem u ontologiji muzike koje odriče da se muzička dela ponavljaju u izvođenjima muzike. Pokazaćemo da ponovljivost muzičkih dela podrazumeva da su ona audibilna i varijabilna u svojim izvođenjima. U tom pogledu, naš cilj je da pokažemo da su ponovljivost, audibilnost i varijabilnost ontološki supstancijalne odlike prirode muzičkih dela. Branićemo tezu da su ponovljivost, audibilnost i varijabilnost dispozicionalna i neestetska svojstva muzičkih dela. Plauzibilnost dispozicionalnog pristupa ponovljivosti, audibilnosti i varijabilnosti muzičkih dela vodi zaključku da su u pitanju ontološki supstancijalne odlike prirode muzičkih dela, te da ih, posledično, nijedno adekvatno objašnjenje ontologije muzičkih dela ne sme zanemariti.

Ključne reči: ontologija muzike, muzička dela, izvođenja muzike, ponovljivost, audibilnost, varijabilnost, dispozicije, muzički medijum, zajedničko tlo, kontekstualizam.